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ABSTRACT

Middle school pupils tend to enjoy writing verse containing a selected number of syllables per line. A student teacher taught a unit on poetry writing which included a section on writing tanka verse--a 5-line form with five, seven, five, seven, and seven syllables per line. After discovering the characteristics of a tanka from a model, the class as a whole wrote a tanka. Next, students wrote a tanka with a peer, and shared some of their feelings when working with other pupils. Interest remained high as learners read their tankas to others in the classroom. Finally, students wrote tankas as a homework challenge--and 23 of 25 students brought tankas to school. Writing tankas can be one means of having learners develop their own ideas and put them into print. (SR)

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ED 363 [illegible]

MIDDLE SCHOOL PUPILS WRITE TANKAS

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Middle school pupils tend to enjoy writing verse containing selected number of syllables per line. A student teacher (ST) supervised by the writer taught a unit on "Writing Poetry." One section of the unit stressed middle school pupils writing tanka verse. These learners previously had written haiku with its five- seven- five sequence in syllables per line respectively. Sequentially, two more lines are needed in the writing of tankas with seven additional syllables for each of two lines of verse. Thus a tanka has a five- seven- five- seven- seven number of syllables for each sequential line of poetry. To introduce the lesson, the ST read a tanka she had written. The tanka read as follows;

Winter
Long cold nights are here
The short daylight hours capture
The sun's rays always
People dress warmly in time
Liking the joyous season.

After reading the poem with proper voice inflection, the ST copied the poem on the chalk board. Learners were asked to describe the poem in terms of its characteristics. There were moments of silence as learners pondered over the description. One pupils stated there was no rhyme in the poem. All seemed to notice that the poem contained five lines. It took approximately two minutes for one learner to notice that the first three lines were a haiku. He was puzzled over the remaining two lines. The ST had pupils notice how many syllables there were in each of the last two lines. With careful counting on their fingers, pupils responded with seven syllables for each of the last two lines of the poem.

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The ST then stated that the entire poem was a tanka. Learners asked if they could write a tanka with the class as a whole being involved. The ST asked what the contents of the poem should be about. Two learners suggested the title to be "Snow." The rest of the class agreed to the suggested title. Pupils then brainstormed the lines for the poem. After much deliberation, pupils came up with the following tanka;

SNOW

Chilling in the wind
Heavy flakes of frozen rain
Numbing the cold hands
Sights are beautiful, scenic
A wonderful world, behold!

Pupils came up with some relevant statements pertaining to the writing of tankas. These were the following;

1. I think of rhyme so often when writing poetry.
2. It is difficult to write anything when putting in so many syllables per line.
3. I like to write all types of verse and tanka gives me a unique way of thinking about creativity. A gifted pupil make this evaluative statement.
4. Tanka writing makes me think. I then need to come up with a certain number of syllables for each line of written content.
5. We should write a tanka in a small group or committee setting.

Learners then wished to write tankas with a peer. This was easily arranged since learners had just started working with a different peer yesterday. Quickly and quietly, pupils seemingly were thoroughly involved in tanka writing. Not often does one see all peer groups on task. Enthusiasm appeared to be high. One tanka that two involved peers brought to the writer was the following;

HOLIDAYS

Bright lights in the cold
Hovering in the cold snow
Eager for the feast
Gifts, wrapping, joy, happiness
I love this time of the year!

Peers shared some of their feelings when working with one other pupil. They felt that

1. It is much easier to share ideas for writing a tanka with one other pupil than with the class as a whole.
2. Learning is fun when working with a peer.
3. We should write more poetry.
4. It would be enjoyable to write a poem with a different peer. The pupil that made this statement mentioned he had thoroughly enjoyed working with the peer in writing the just completed tanka. The former is highly accepting of others.
5. We would like to read our poem to others and have them share their tankas with us (this came from the peer group expressing the idea.)

Interest continued to be high as learners read their tankas to others in the classroom setting. At random, the writer picked the following tanka representing peer writing that was shared orally with others in the classroom;

Night

Long hours of night time
Cold weather howls in the air
My bedroom is warm
Gifts lie wrapped under the tree
I can't wait for Christmas day!

Writing poetry as homework has fascinated many pupils providing that readiness for the activity is in evidence. The ST had pupils suggest

titles for additional tankas. These titles were printed on the chalkboard. The ST challenged pupils to write a tanka as homework. The completed poems could be brought to the classroom within the next two weeks. The ST and the cooperating teacher were surprised when 23 of 25 learners returned their homework challenge. Most wanted to share their work with others. A shy pupil at the beginning of sharing time may not feel comfortable reading his/her poem orally to peers However, once a few pupils share ideas, the shy learner also feels a need to communicate with others that which has been written and in this case the tanka. One pupil shared the following with classmates;

Walking in Snow
I like to see snow
It quickly swirls in the air
Round and round it goes
How quickly can it all end?
Wait until the summer months.

In Closing

Pupils tend to enjoy writing creatively. Writing tankas can be one means of having learners develop their very own ideas and putting the content in to print. Pupils need readiness experiences for subject matter acquisition, as well as skills to write tankas with its syllabication requirements. If pupils cannot hear syllables adequately, other forms of creative writing should be stressed. However, the ST found that learners are very willing to learn about syllables even if they are not the most proficient in doing so. If the goal in tanka writing is clear to pupils, maximum effort may well be put forth in writing creatively.